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Nanny McPhee, an Icon for Interim Leaders

A good friend of mine believes that the Peter Falk television detective Columbo offers a perfect model for pastoral ministry. For him the bumbling, fumbling sometimes annoying style that Columbo uses to figure out whodunit becomes an intentional way to help people reveal what is really going on in their personal and spiritual development. When the real agenda is revealed, it can then be addressed.



Not to be outdone, I would like to offer Nanny McPhee as the ultimate interim leader. Her maxim is *"When you need me but do not want me, then I will stay. When you want me but do not need me, then I have to go."* Nanny isn't wanted when she first appears, but no-one wants her to leave when it is time for her to go. In this process of being detested to being wanted Nanny confronts undesirable and infantile behavior, helps family members become what they really do want to be, and becomes more beautiful in everyone's eyes.

Nanny McPhee resonates with me because I've now completed six interim leader assignments and helped to set up or advise several others. In each case the idea of the interim leader is resignedly submitted to at best and at worse produces a sneer. But as the assignment goes on and the real agenda gets dealt with, the sneering becomes genuine affection and sorrow that the interim leader must leave. The key is to direct that affection and those new behaviors into the possibility of a long and strong love for the new leader who will invest a substantial portion of their life in the well being of the organization and faithfulness of volunteers/employees/constituents to its mission.

Serving as an interim leader is good work and often lonely so it is good to have a heroic model to follow. And in the process of helping congregations, ministry organizations, family businesses and even large enterprises understand the importance of interim periods, it is good to have an illustration to which to point—even if it is a goofy and fictional movie character.

-mark I vincent

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